GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:559
ANSWERED ON:25.07.2001
GOODWILL GESTURES
BHIM PRASAD DAHAL

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government as goodwill gestures towards Pakistan has recently announced release of Pakistani civilians from Indian Jails, offer of scholarship to Pak students, reduction of tariffs on the import of 50 Pakistani items etc; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH)

(a)&(b) India is committed to establishing a relationship of peace, friendship and cooperation with Pakistan. Consistent with this objective, and as part of its efforts to build a conducive atmosphere in advance of the visit of President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan to India (14th-16th July, 2001), Prime Minister took several significant and far reaching decisions relating to peace and security, development of people to people contacts, humanitarian issues, education, youth and trade.

On 4th July 2001, Government announced that 20 scholarships in Indian technical institutes would be offered to students from Pakistan; Pakistani poets, academics, writers and artistes will be invited individually or in groups for a month long visit as guests of the Government of India; and, that groups of Pakistani students (from school and university, boys and girls) will be invited by the Government to visit and tour Indian academic establishments. To further promote trade and commerce between India and Pakistan, Government also announced a liberalization of imports from Pakistan by reducing/eliminating tariffs on 50 tariff lines. Recognizing the hardship faced by poor fishermen from India and Pakistan, who from time to time are taken into custody after inadvertently transgressing territorial waters of the other country, Government instructed the Indian Coast Guard not to take into custody Pakistani fishermen who inadvertently transgress into Indian territorial waters. Pakistani fishermen will instead be turned back after a warning. Government also decided to take expeditious action for the release of all Pakistani `civilian` prisoners after due processes of law.

Durable peace and stability between India and Pakistan are vital for both countries. Government are encouraged by the relative quiet that prevails along the LoC and AGPL in Jammu and Kashmir. On 6th July 2001, Government instructed the Director General of Military Operations to visit Pakistan to meet his counterpart so that the processes of peace along the LoC and the AGPL can be strengthened and stabilized further. The Ministry of External Affairs has also been instructed to propose an expert level official dialogue with Pakistan on security concepts and Nuclear Confidence Building Measures. In addition to the official level dialogue, non-official exchanges would also be encouraged

On 9th July 2001, Government announced further measures to make travel between India and Pakistan as simple as possible. Pakistani passport holders will be allowed to come by the road route and obtain visas at the check post at Attari. An additional check post will be opened at Munabao, in Rajasthan. Similar check posts would also be opened at designated points along the IB and the LoC in Jammu & Kashmir.

Government are of the view that these measures will contribute positively to the establishment of good neighbourly ties with Pakistan.